

CHAPTER 190

November 3, 2011

“Dammit Naoto, I’m not in the mood for this shit today.”

Justin had been sitting at the park bench near the riverbed, going through some papers when Naoto had the audacity to approach him, clearly interested in advancing her investigation into the thievery that had taken place at her house but a few weeks earlier. Justin, alas, was not in the mood for her shenanigans. He had enough going on in his life as it was, not to mention the splitting headache shooting through his skull. He needed to get this paperwork done as soon as possible, so the less Naoto bugged him about this shit, the better. Really, Justin had probably been acting a bit paranoid earlier when this guy claimed to know about his father. Justin never talked about it mind you, but he supposed that people DID know; and stuff does spread from time to time. It wasn’t too big of a deal that people knew Justin’s father was in the FBI, now that he thought about it. The guy was dead now, so it was all irrelevant. That said, Justin could really care less at this moment in time whether the case got solved or not. Naoto stared at Justin with a vexed expression as she stared at him shuffling through his papers, not so much as looking up from their contents to examine Naoto as she took a seat across from him at the bench.

“I see you’ve been occupying yourself.” Naoto remarked with interest as she tried to get a glimpse at the paper’s contents. Perhaps curiosity killed the cat, especially when the cat was curious about a blood hound, but she couldn’t seem to help herself from leaning over to try and read what had been printed on the sheet in Justin’s hands. He immediately noticed too and turned the paper to face away from her, a slightly annoyed expression on his face as he stared up at the sky. If she wanted to know what the papers were for, she was going to have to ask like a regular human being instead of trying to sneak it out from under his nose. And Naoto knew it. “Important documents?”

“You could say that.” Justin sighed after a moment, dropping the papers back onto his lap to continue reading whatever it had been that had been preoccupying him. “It seems no one wanted to tell me that Maya could attend school for free due to her condition-” Justin paused to pass Naoto a slightly dirty glare. They weren’t exactly best buddies or anything, hell Justin despised her, but they did interact under circumstances such as this or the investigation team. And he knew she knew about this; which meant she had plenty of opportunity to inform him about this. Naoto sighed a bit with annoyance as Justin gave her the stinker eye. She was well aware of that, but she would think Justin would have known that. “So now I have to fill out a bunch of forms to get Maya into a class with me. I’m the closest thing to a guardian she has, so that means a shit ton of paperwork for me.”

"That's a rather large pile of papers; seems you have your hands full." Naoto remarked, eyes examining the stack of papers in Justin's lap. Justin groaned a bit, staring off into the distance for a brief moment as if to avoid eye contact with Naoto. What the hell was her deal today anyway? He was busy and here she was trying to make small-talk, which was an unpleasant surprise in its own right. Sounded to Justin like she was just trying to butter him up so that he would stop what he was doing and help her with her damn investigation. He just was not in the mood or state of mind to be putting up with some petty thief today though; he just wanted to concentrate on getting Maya into a classroom. Alas, she was being civil though, so at the very least he'd have to put up with her bullshit. At least until she showed her true colors.

"Half of it's to get Maya in the same class as us. I don't think it's really appropriate for her to go into a freshman class when she's older than me. I just said that me and Yosuke were her 'assistants' and she needed us to translate for her. Seemed like a good enough explanation for them, though she does need to take an equivalency test by the end of the school year, which means I need to buy her books, which is what forms G2 to G6 are for..." Justin rambled on and on about the paperwork he had to fill out, words speeding out of his mouth quicker than mosquitoes soaring through the air. It was like he had a shit ton on his mind, and yet the only way to actually organize it was to just vocalize it; only, he wasn't speaking with the intent to organize the mess in his mind, he was simply speaking to bitch about how ridiculous the amount of paperwork he had to fill out was. "So she needs to cram eighth grade, freshman, and sophomore curriculum in a matter of a few months; really, it's all just a mess. And don't get me started on the documents I have to send in."

"And you say I talk too much." Naoto chuckled to herself silently. At least, she had until Justin turned to shoot her one of the most vicious glares she had ever seen. She had to note to herself that as much of a hypocrite Justin was, she could never say anything that implied he was less than perfect. It was a shitty double standard, but she'd rather avoid as much conflict as possible in regards to her business partnership with Justin. "Oh, uh... d-documents?" Naoto stammered, nervously trying to change the subject. Justin glared at her for a moment longer before turning back to his paperwork, as if growing tired with being pissed at the detective.

"Yes documents. Birth certificates, high school diploma, which of course she can be exempt from if I just fill these forms out and she aces her equivalency test, Passport; all stuff I don't have and have no idea how to get a hold of." Justin sighed a bit before dropping the stack of papers off to his side, crossing his arms with annoyance as he stared back out to the river. This was all important stuff he needed, but he had zero means of actually getting it. Unless Maya just so happened to want to sneak back through the television to San Diego, it wasn't happening; as much as it pissed him off that they were so close. And even if she did, there was NO way she was going to be able to get her birth certificate without drawing attention

to herself; an obvious problem when she was trying to run away from her family and the police. She missed her family, don't get her wrong; but she couldn't see her family again and go back to Japan. And she just couldn't live there anymore, not after everything she had done. Besides, she had friends and family here now. Maybe Justin wasn't really her brother, and maybe she really did miss her own flesh and blood; but he treated her like she was his sister. And that was good enough for her.

Naoto raised her eyebrow with intrigue, rubbing her chin briefly as she stared at Justin. She could certainly see how not having any of the legal documents that made you a legal citizen could be problematic. By all accounts, Maya was an illegal immigrant, and Yasogami was by no means a public school. They didn't just let this stuff kind of slide. She needed citizenship to get into school; and of course becoming a citizen was going to be a rather difficult and long process. She couldn't help with that unfortunately; but she could assist with one of Justin's problems. "... I... might be able to get access to Miss Jefferies files again. Perhaps that could be of assistance?" Naoto questioned. Being off the case meant her resources with the police department were severely limited now. She might be able to get access if she associated Maya with the Burned Man Case in California, hell, it wouldn't really be a lie; but then, that all depended on whether the Inaba Police Department was willing to give access to files on a case that wasn't related to Japan in the slightest. Not their country, not their problem after all. Justin passed Naoto a very confused if somewhat annoyed expression as she offered her services to search through a database of files.

"And how is that supposed to help?" Justin inquired somewhat angrily. If anything, the mere mention of Naoto having gone through those files was pissing him off. It just reminded him how Naoto had tried to accuse Maya of being a murderer. I mean for fuck's sake; yeah, she killed the guy, but it was self defense and he WAS in the fucking mafia. Hell, he was probably the boss of that family. If anything Maya did a great service to the people of San Diego by putting that mutt down. Who honestly cared if a criminal got killed? There was NO reason to go investigating this case. The case went unsolved for two years in the death of the leader of an underground crime syndicate; some things just need to be swept under the rug and forgotten about instead of wasting everyone's time and resources. And even if Naoto hadn't been a complete bitch by implying that Maya was responsible for that man's death at every chance, using her and Justin's files to try and convict them of a crime they were innocent of, what in god's name would a few records be useful for? Justin knew all this stuff without Naoto digging around through police files; and even if he didn't that was what Maya was around for. Naoto glared slightly at Justin, annoyed that he was going to fight her even when she was clearly trying to help the best she could. Besides, maybe if he actually paused and thought about it, it would actually occur to him what kind of files Naoto could get a hold of.

"You said you needed the birth certificate, no?" Naoto countered with annoyance. "I can get a copy of her birth certificate transferred over; everything else I can't help you with." Naoto explained, standing up to stretch her back, ready to march off. She doubted Justin would actually accept her help; he never did. And it was clear he was trying to fight her every step of the way here; so why was she even bothering trying to help? She had done everything in her power to at least be on neutral grounds with Justin, and yet he would not stop with the hatred. So that's it; she gave up trying to break through to him. He wanted to be a complete asshole all the time, then so be it. He could wallow around in his pain and misery for the rest of his days for all she gave a damn. She slowly began to walk away Justin simply staring at her as she marched off, grass crunching beneath her feet. And for just a split second, he kind of felt like an asshole. Yeah, she was a bitch; but she was trying to help, and here he was questioning her on everything, rejecting any attempt of assistance she had given. He sighed shaking his head a bit.

"Wait." He called out, silently, yet forcefully at the same time. Naoto obliged, if only to turn and give Justin one last glare. She figured anything he had to say wasn't worth listening to anyway; but at the very least, she'd pretend to care. She'd be the bigger person and give Justin the one thing he never gave her: a chance. "...I appreciate it." Justin eventually choked up. It looked almost painful for him to say it, as if his vocal chords were trying to cut themselves before he could speak the words that his heart hoped to never be spoken. Naoto stared blankly at Justin for a moment, as if just struggling to process such a simple sentence, before a slight grin made its way across her face. It wasn't much, but it was a huge step forward.

"Anytime." She remarked before turning back around, adjusting her hat all the while. You remember how Kurt tended to have the nervous reaction of tipping his fedora forward? Naoto kind of had the same thing going on; though rather than being a nervous reaction she did it anytime she felt some sense of happiness; usually as a result of solving some kind of riddle. Which kind of annoyed Justin in a way, because it just made her seem so smug about her accomplishments. There was nothing wrong with being satisfied with your accomplishments of course, but having a physical tell that you were satisfied with your accomplishments was just... ugh. Whatever, he'd let it slide. But it still pissed him off. Of course, Naoto still had stuff to do so she eventually turned back around to march away. She really shouldn't have even bothered.

"I'm not stupid Naoto, you wanted something." Justin remarked with annoyance as she turned back around. She grimaced ever so slightly to herself before turning around and making her way back, a sigh on her breath. It was true she had come here in regards to their investigation, but she supposed it wasn't too big of a deal if Justin was busy with paperwork. Seemed Justin wasn't going to let her out of his sight until she spat out what she wanted though. Funny, Justin had known Naoto was trying to butter him up for this express purpose and he still walked right into it. Maybe he just needed a break from the paperwork; maybe he just felt bad for being

a prick. Maybe he realized that his father's identity wasn't really something to blow off; even if the consequences wouldn't be as dire as Justin had first believed. Naoto precariously took a seat on the bench next to Justin before pulling the card from earlier out of her jacket pocket. Strangely, the paper texture looked rather... well... crisp. Most likely from being burned. Justin really had to wonder if Naoto was stupid enough to try burning it. In truth, it was a rather smart decision on her part.

"I was examining the card I received from our culprit earlier when I noticed it had a rather pungent scent of citrus fruit on it. At first I was confused as to why that was... and then it struck me; the culprit was using invisible ink. I was able to get the scripture to reappear by burning the back of the paper over a fire, but I haven't quite deduced what this letter's actually supposed to mean." Naoto remarked as she passed the card off to Justin. He couldn't deny he was impressed by their culprit's ingenuity; he didn't even know invisible ink was a real thing. All the same, he examined the card for a brief moment before passing it back to Naoto, a somewhat irritated tone of voice all the while.

"It's obviously a riddle."

"I get that much." Naoto rolled her eyes a bit as she snatched the envelope out of Justin's hand. She could figure out it was a riddle, she just couldn't quite grasp the solution. It seemed so obvious to her, yet she couldn't grasp it as it hung off the tip of her tongue. I guess brain blocks happen to just about everyone; even ace detectives. "Eating letters with a red face. It's quite clearly a riddle, but as to what the solution is I just can't put my finger on it." Naoto rubbed at her chin a bit as she read the card over again, hoping for anything to help her figure it out. Justin just raised his eyebrow with confusion. An ace detective stumbling over as simple a riddle as this. Maybe Justin just loved riddles; maybe he was just really smart. Whatever it was, the answer was immediately clear to him.

"...Seriously? It's a double meaning. Eating letters in this case means a letter in an envelope, and eating is a metaphor. What would you put letters in that one would consider it being eaten?"

"A shredder?"

"...Well I guess that too, but most shredders aren't red." Justin rolled his eyes a bit. Either Naoto had never seen a mailbox in all her life or she was a lot dumber than she pretended to be. "A mailbox. The red face is the slot, and when you put envelopes through the slot, it's like the letter is being eaten. There you fucking go." Justin sighed shaking his head a bit. Naoto, immediately slapped herself up the forehead.

"Of course! It had been on the tip of my tongue this entire time, though I was struggling to grasp a hold of what it had been in the back of my mind." Naoto remarked with annoyance with herself, examining the letter a second time over just

so she could remind herself how stupid she was not to get such a simple riddle. Perhaps she just needed to chill out; with all this stress she wasn't thinking straight. Take a break, get some sleep; you know that stuff, just to relax and revitalize her thought process.

"Suuuuuuure, you did."

"My gratitude. You're good with riddles, I see."

"It's one of my many talents, though probably the only one that's legal in all fifty states."